**Environmental Problems & Human Behavior**

(35 points for your response submitted in the Drop Box for this week. Post your thoughts on this assingment and the issues it raises in the Forum for 6 points. Respond to 2 other students in the Discussion Forum for additional points)

**Learning Outcomes for Research and Discussion Topic on Environmental Problems and Human Behavior**

1. Apply cognitive-behavioral reinforcement concepts to a current issue in the society and to the student’s personal behavior (also known as the social cognitive pespective in psychology).

2. Describe the role values, beliefs, perception and reinforcement play in shaping behavior related to environmental issues.

3. Compare the dominant American worldview with the traditional Native American worldview about the role of human behavior in the natural world.

4. Synthesize several sources dealing to describe the current state of scientific knowledge about a controversial topic and compare it with one’s personal views.

**The central task of this assignment is to apply psychological concepts of “social-cognitive” psychology to a current issue in our lives (also known as cognitive-behavioral psychology).** We are using environmental problems as the vehicle for demonstrating your understanding and ability to apply these psychological concepts. The power of reinforcers for your behavior is impacted not only by what happens to you immediately after performing the behavior, but also by your perception of the issue and the reinforcers. Perception is influenced by knowledge, beliefs, personal values, preferences, fears, past experiences, and more. Reality does not govern our behavior as much as our perception of reality does. For example, one person may place a very high value on time, another may place a much lower value. One may place a high value on contributing to a better world in the future due to certain beliefs and values; another person may have a different set of beliefs and values that leads to placing a very low value on the future (known as "discounting the future"). You need to explain the causes of your behavior in cognitive-behavioral reinforcement terms, and explain how these reinforcers get their power for you through such things as monetary value, convenience, your personal values, and your beliefs about how your behavior and that of others affect future well-being for yourself and future generations (i.e. positive and negative reinforcers).

**Required resources to review before writing your response to the assignment**

**A. Your Ecological Footprint.** Calculate your ecological footprint and describe the factors that contribute to it in your response to the assignment. Complete the Ecological footprint worksheet on this web site at the Global Footprint Network web site:<http://www.footprintnetwork.org/> It is important that you try different answers to the questions to see how various changes in your behavior impact your ecological footprint.

The concept of “ecological footprint” is explained as you complete the worksheet. You do not need to identify yourself or buy anything! You will need to address the ecological footprint concept in your response to this assignment. The main point here is to see how various behaviors impact the relative size of your footprint, to think about how your behavior has been shaped by reinforcers, and what it requires to reduce your footprint.

Trying to decide if the web site’s calculation of your footprint size is exactly accurate is not needed for this exercise. All estimates indicate that our average American lifestyle cannot be supported on the planet if all humans lived as we Americans do. Whether is would 3 , 5, 7, or 100 earth’s is not important for this assignment. If this is of concern to you, click on the link in the left frame "Personal Footprint Calculator Frequently Asked Questions". What is important is that you recognize that your level of consumption and pollution is shaped by your chosen behaviors that have reinforcement value for you, and that those reinforcers derive their power from your perception of what you need or want, and from your perception of the impacts of your behaviors on things that you care about. You will need to describe the reinforcers that shape your relevant behaviors and where they get their power for you in terms of your values and beliefs.

**B. After calculating your footprint, view these two videos:**

**1.** “The Story of Stuff” at<http://www.storyofstuff.com/> is a 20 minute video describing the life cycle of the things we buy.

**2.** “Ecological Intelligence” on PBS’s “Bill Moyers Journal” is an interview with Daniel Goleman who also described Emotional Intelligence in the 1990’s. This 20 minute video also addresses the life cycle of products we buy.<http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/05152009/watch2.html>

**C.** Behavior change to reduce the problem. Peruse ONE of these web sites for information about behaviors you can choose to affect your contribution to environmental problems.

* National Geographic’s Green Guide for things to do to reduce one’s impact on ecosystems**:**<http://www.thegreenguide.com/>
* TheNatural Resources Defense Council web site (NRDC) offers many things we can do in homes, workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods to reduce our impact on ecosystems. Visit this web site for some ideas about how you can reduce your impact and footprint. [http://www.nrdc.org/cities/living/gover.asp#](http://www.nrdc.org/cities/living/gover.asp)
* The Good Guide is relatively new web site by a non-profit organization whose purpose of existence is to disseminate information about the environmental impact of the daily products we use in our lives. It is a reliable guide for shopping with a goal of selecting products with lower environmental impact.<http://www.goodguide.com/>

**Writing your response to this topic**

Now you will apply the required resources above to address the following issues. Post your response in ONE message. Your response to this assignment must address the following four sections by number and name. Remember, scoring well will require that you incorporate elements of the assigned resources (cite each so I see it) and of Chapter 7 somewhere in your response.

**Section 1: Your Ecological Footprint** (25 points; 200 words standard; cite elements of the several required resources listed in #1 and #2 above). Address the following issues after calculating your footprint at<http://www.footprintnetwork.org/> . You will be describing your cognitive-behavioral map in addressing the following items. Include the effects, if any, on the power of reinforcers for your behavior of the following required resources:

· “The Story of Stuff” video

· “Ecological Intelligence” video

· The “Good Guide” or “The Green Guide” or the “NRDC web site”

Address the following in your ecological footprint section

1. Describe your ecological footprint size and the **reinforcers for your behavior** that have influenced its size in the various categories. (9 points)

2. What **values and beliefs** do you hold about the effects of your behavioral choices in each category, and how do they impact the value of the reinforcers for your behaviors in each category? (4 points)

3. What **aversive outcomes and barriers** maintain your behaviors or keep them from changing to lower your footprint? (Relevant Concepts file) (4 points)

4. How can your **ecological footprint** be reduced and how might the required behavior change be encouraged through **reinforcers and punishment** (aversive outcomes or conditions)? (4 points)

5. How does the information in the various resources used in this assignment influence the power of reinforcersfor changing your behavior? You must show knowledge of the videos, required files, and web site resources by naming and describing how each might influence behavior. (4 points).

**Section 2:** Compare your worldview and the dominant worldview of North Americans with a traditional Native American worldview. (5 points; 150-200 words standard)

Chief Seathl’s speech of 1855 is often cited as a wellspring of inspiration for environmentalists. The city of Seattle was named after him. The speech’s ideas have appeared in several versions over the years. The one you will read on this web page was actually written by Thomas Perry, a Hollywood screen writer, in 1970 for a movie. While is true to the spirit of the original paraphrasing written by a reporter who was present at the treaty signing in 1855, it is not a verbatim account. The web site linked here is actually in England, and a web search of Chief Seathl will identify numerous web sites in several countries displaying versions of his speech and describing the controversies surrounding the accuracy of it. From my experiences of living in Native American communities in the Dakotas and Montana for 11 years, it seems to convey a Native American worldview of the nature of the earth and the role of humanity on it. Our purpose in reading this speech is to compare the values, beliefs, and behaviors described in it with those of today’s dominant American culture in general. Go to:<http://www.onevillage.co.uk/Chief-Seathl.htm>

Chief Seathl’s speech describes a worldview (the nature of the world and the role of humans in it). Do not focus on whether this speech is historically accurate or reflects current behaviors in Native American communities. The main point is how the speech as portrayed here reflects a world view and how it compares with the dominant North American world view.

**In Section 2 of your response**, compare the values and beliefs about the role of humans in the world expressed in Chief Seathl’s speech with those of American society in general.

1. How is Chief Seathl’s worldview different from your own and from the dominant North American worldview?
2. What effect would Chief Seathl’s worldview have on the power of reinforcers for Americans as they choose their behaviors regarding transportation, recycling, and the products we buy?
3. How would Chief Seathl’s worldview influence our governments’ policies about these issues if it was the dominant view in this country?

**Section 3: Your view of this assignment**(5 points; 50-100 words standard)

Some students feel that this assignment has nothing to do with psychology. On the contrary, it is quite central to psychology these days. Alleviating our environmental problems requires changing behavior. Understanding what supports our present behavior and what it takes to induce us to change our behavior is the central province of psychology. Remember, all behavior exists because of reinforcers. Our values and beliefs about the way the world works are part of the influences on the reinforcement value of behaviors in the social cognitive or cognitive-behavioral perspective in psychology. Describe your reaction to this assignment and any effect it has had on your view of the role of human behavior in environmental problems. It is OK to say that the whole things was a waste of your time or had no effect if that is your perception it, but explain why you feel this way and why the various resources were of no value to you.

Place your primary response in this week's Drop Box for 35 points; Post comments in discussion forum for 4 points.

Bob Riesenberg, MSW, MA, Ph.D.

Whatcom Community College and Washington Online